

THE SHAPE OF THE NEW ELCA*
(EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH In AMERICA)



From left, Crumley, Preus, Herzfeld

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THE SHAPE OF THE NEW ELCA

One has to wonder if the present day merger veterans of the LCA and ALC foundings in the early Sixties didn't feel back then already that more Lutheran mergers were in the wing. Now 25 years later, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) will be the new home for what formerly had been 27 different Lutheran groups. Eleven of these come through the LCA, dating back to 1746. Fifteen are part of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), dating back to 1818. The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) was formed in 1976, primarily as a breakoff from LC-MS.

For almost a decade now this latest Lutheran merger has been big and regular news in our Northwestern Lutherans, Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Christian News, and secular newspapers and magazines. The April 30 - May 3 Constituting Convention in Columbus, Ohio, and formal merge date of January 1, 1988, should warrant radio and television coverage for this monumental event bringing together 5.3 million Americans who share the same faith.

What follows is a summary of what has happened, what remains toward complete merger, and what can be expected over the long run. Paralleling these phases of the merger are three lines of thought which match up quite well under the title, "THE SHAPE OF THE NEW ELCA." Our trio of considerations will deal with:

- I. Steps Shaping the Merger.
- II. The Demographic/Structural Shape of the New Body.
- III. The Shape of Theology to be Expected from the ELCA.

I. STEPS SHAPING THE MERGER.

It has been the LCA which has been the big pusher toward final consolidation of "all" Lutheran denominations into one body. Their very constitution calls for commitment to bringing as many North American Lutherans as possible into some kind of structural union. Their president, Bishop James R. Crumley, Jr., has for years been an advocate of merger among Lutherans and with others beyond.

On the contrary, as recent as late 1980, ALC presiding Bishop Dr. David W. Preus, was quoted as saying, "Organizational merger of only three Lutheran bodies should not be a priority for the 1980s."

What finally got the ball really rolling?! Growing inter-church activity made even the casual observer sense that something precipitous was on the horizon. But it remained for the youngest and smallest kid on the block to get things off dead center. In 1978, only two years after organization, the 110,000 AELC passed a synodical resolution which was a call-for-union to all Lutherans. What they accomplished was the formation of the Committee on Lutheran Unity which first met on October 7-9, 1979, at Columbia, South Carolina.

The committee was composed of seven representatives each from the 2.3 million ALC and the 2.9 million LCA, and two from the AELC. The ALC reps, true to colors, came with concern that there be common commitment to a larger structural union. Early on, ALC president Preus expressed

favoring a policy of "growing together." He was of firm belief that for the present their individual and collective missions would be served most effectively by retaining their structural identities.

The sixteen member Committee on Lutheran Unity(CoLUision for short) eased the ALC toward merger by providing opportunity for delegates at the district and synod conventions in 1981 to express their opinions by ballot on the "whether" and "how" of structural union. In the months preceding, congregations were encouraged to study a 32 page booklet on an inter-Lutheran cluster basis.

The first part of the booklet discussed the nature and mission of the church. The January 21, 1981, issue of The Lutheran listed six summarizing statements from this document. I did not have opportunity to check out the book, but if the summary statements are true to its content, one can comprehend a cheerleading for unity:

The Church Is a Visible Body of Believers.
(What about invisible Church Universal?!)

The Church Is to Serve God's Mission.

The Spirit Gives a Variety of Gifts to Carry out God's Mission.

The Variety of Gifts Are Not to Lead to Competition or Envy.

Unity Is a Present Reality.

Unity Is a Dynamic Reality.

Discussed in the second half of the booklet were the options before the bodies:

- 1) Remain as three churches.
- 2) Become non-geographic entities within one church.(The ALC, AELC, and LCA would continue as organized except for matters assigned to the church at large.)
- 3) Become geographic entities within one church. There would be from 5 to 8 of ~~these~~ geographic entities, with some functions assumed by smaller entities of about 100 congregations.
- 4) ONE CHURCH. This type emphasized a strong central church, the true full merger the real hypists dreamed about.

During the earlier part of 1981 the Committee on Lutheran Unity (along the way increased to 8(LCA), 8(ALC), and 3(AELC)members)conducted its "secret" polling of the 54 synods or districts of its various denominations which met in that time frame.

The results reported at its September 14-15, 1981 meeting in Minneapolis, showed the call for the formation of a new church was favored by a 6 to 1 margin, with every one of the 54 districts or synods in favor.

Since the polling had no binding force, the CLU proceeded to formulate a commitment to union which it put to a vote at the 1982 conventions of the three bodies. Though not meeting in the same city, the simultaneous voting showed the following statistics:

LCA: 669 for, 11 against / ALC: 897 to 87 / AELC: 136 to 0

The AELC vote could be a reflection of who stands to gain the most from a larger body. The LCAs penchant for merger showed itself in dramatic fashion, and most surprising of all - the ALC showed a more than 10 to 1 favoring of the move.

THE TRANSITION PERIOD:

The landslide vote all but sealed the unification. A "Commission for a New Lutheran Church" was formed. It was made up of 70 officials, 31 each from the ALC and LCA, and 8 from the AELC. Members hailed from 24 states, Puerto Rico, and Switzerland. There were 42 males and 28 females. A full 20%, or 14, members of the commission were non-whites or persons whose primary language was other than English. The yet to be formed body's commitment to minorities seemed well established! Elected chairperson was William Kinnison, president of Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio. His term ran from 1982 until 1984, when he was re-elected to finish out the transition. The commission held ten meetings, some three, some five days each - for a total of 44 days. Even using models existing among their present structures, the 200 page Report and Recommendations displays a great deal of cooperation and compromise to bring forth the fruits of such well-thought-out detail. 96.5% attendance at the 10 meetings shows the enthusiasm these people brought to their task. A transition team of ten salaried workers served the commission for and between their meetings. These merger activity costs could run \$2.5 million, not bad when one considers the annual operating budget of synods, regions, and church (beyond the local congregations) more than likely will be over \$100 million the first year of operation (1988).

The first order of business was to establish a name for the new body. Someone suggested the "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Well, it so hapened that a little known church body of four congregations already bore that title. Their last pastor, Thore Larson, died in late 1982. A Bishop Herbert Chilstrom visited the four congregation body, seeking their blessing on the big church using their name. At the annual meeting of the four churches in April, 1986, it was unanimously decided to not allow them to use the name. They haven't heard back since why the proposed ELCA still intends to use their title anyway. It could be because the little body has no ordained ministry giving them credence, or it could be because they also are known to go by the title Eielsen Synod, or because while they have a federal tax exempt number under the ELCA name, they never were incorporated in Minnesota, or because they are figured to die out soon anyway - maybe to merge themselves with the new body!

At any rate, Rev. Herman Otten sees a hole in the new church's social issues front: "(These) liberals pride themselves in listening to minorities and paying attention to their desires." Could the whole thing be resolved by having the new body go by the title ELC of A, instead of ELC in A?! It seems so simple! Why didn't anyone think of it sooner?!? Oh well, on to more important issues.

Receiving a lot of hoopla early, before fizzling was discussion where denominational headquarters should be set up. The LCA is presently headquartered in New York, the ALC in Minneapolis, and the AELC appears to work out of St. Louis (president Herzfeld is in Oakland, CA). It was

that at all costs effort must be made to avoid giving any of the three the "homefield advantage," so an alternate site had to be chosen. Since the Midwest is not only the heart of the country but the heart of Lutheranism (see part two), it made sense to consider a location there. Milwaukee was a real natural for Lutheran headquarters and offered cost efficiency favorable to other metropolitan alternatives available for consideration. The ALC thought Milwaukee would suit just fine when suggested by the Commission, but the delegation from "the City" (LCA) along with the AELC preferred a more "cosmopolitan" atmosphere than a German cow and beer-drinking town. So, Chicago won out. Facilities have since been contracted, pending final approval May, 1987, by the constituting body. The Northwest side, near O'Hare and 13 miles from the loop, has some obvious advantages over Milwaukee, besides allowing Lutheranism in the main to work on shedding some of its German/Nordic image. But the 50% overrun in purchase price and subsequent increased operating cost, forewarned by the Commission could come back to haunt the ELCA.

A real meaningful bug to work out has been the matter of church worker pension. The LCA has been funding their pension at a 12% rate out of subscription offerings from the congregations, while the AELC and ALC have "employer" (congregation) paid setup at 9%. The CNLC recommended a 9 percent employer contribution with a gradual increase to 10% and then 12% for church workers over age 35. The LCA wanted an immediate 12 percent contribution. The commission's proposal won out.

By the way, our WELS pension plan is of the "employer" variety, at about 2%, based on the \$420 congregations kick in for a "typical" 20 year man on synod salary code - about \$20,000. While our own pension plan has a long way to go, it is encouraging to see the strides which have been made in recent years, toward ultimately having a meaningful program - someday! For now, our continuing growing pains will press hard on the resources our people give in love to their Lord.

The wisdom of the quotas for females, laity, and minorities (covered in part two of this paper) got its greatest challenge in the Executive Council of the LCA, secretary Dr. Reuben Swanson leading the charge. His motion to drop quotas lost 12-10.

The last and greatest hurdle toward merger was resolved in the opening months of this 1987. Very early in talks, the ALC had allowed themselves this out: a 2/3 majority of their congregations would have to approve. Lutherans Alert, an organization of conservative ALC people begun way back in 1965, conducted quite a campaign to muster the necessary congregations to nix the whole thing. But voting, which ended March 16th, showed an 81% majority of the 4,660 congregations in favor. During the six month time frame for the congregations to do their voting, 3,752 voted for, 863 against, and 45 abstained. Constitution allowances for congregations which change their mind after the fact of merger will be discussed in closing remarks.

The saying goes, "It ain't over until the fat lady sings." Well, she finally takes the stage April 30, 1987, in Columbus, Ohio. There in a four day convention the three bodies will officially constitute the new church, to begin function January 1, 1988. The interim months have been well plotted toward completing the transition.

II. THE DEMOGRAPHICS AND STRUCTURAL SHAPE OF THE ELCA.

The new Lutheran body will bring together approximately 5.3 million people in the U. S. Where these people live and are concentrated is of interest to us. It was also to the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC). As part of their homework for setting the boundaries of the 65 synods in the new body, the commission developed Where Are The Lutherans?, a county-by-county statistical summary of Lutheran congregations and their members for each of the 50 states in the United States of America. This study included a comparison of the statistical data for Lutherans in the U. S. in 1952 and 1980.

This book was made available for purchase through Augsburg and Fortress publishing houses. My curiosity has been stirred, but purchase will not be in time to help in sharing with you the demographics of the ELCA. However, a summary of areas of Lutheran concentration appeared in the winter issue of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, 1987. I would like to share this with you here: (five leading states in order)

<u>LC-MS</u>	<u>LCA</u>	<u>ALC</u>	<u>WELS</u>
largest in 20	largest in 20	largest in 10	3rd in WISC!
Illinois	Pennsylvania	Minnesota	Wisconsin
Wisconsin	Minnesota	Wisconsin	Minnesota
Michigan	Illinois	Iowa	Michigan
Minnesota	Ohio	North Dakota	stop after 3
California	New York	Ohio	80% of members
(MS, sixth!)			in top three!
30% members in	41% in top 3	42% in top 3	
top 3 states			

From above, it is clear that LC-MS(2.6 million) is the most national of the four, WELS the least - with over half its 400,000 just in Wisconsin and 60,000 and 50,000 in Minnesota and Michigan, respectively.

The LCA numbers approximately 2.9, the ALC 2.3, and AELC .1, with distribution probably comparable with LC-MS.

The Midwest remains the heartland of American Lutheranism since it includes six of the seven leading states, which are:

Minnesota
Wisconsin
Pennsylvania
Illinois
Michigan
Ohio
Iowa

California, New York, and Texas round out the top ten. The Dakotas and Nebraska don't rank simply because of sparseness of population, despite high percentages of Lutherans.

Of special interest in our area, the figure 115,000 crossed my desk for Lutherans regarding Lutherans in New England; but I can't recall if that was all Lutheran faiths or just of the three Lutheran bodies which are merging. There are nearly 200 congregations of the new body in New England, and about 1/3 that many LC-MS: CT, somewhat over 100 total; MA, somewhat under 100; ME, 18(2 LC-MS); NH, 17(6 LC-MS); RI, 16(3 LC-MS); and VT, 8(1 LC-MS). These are 1982 Statistics prepared by Lutheran Council in USA. Without counting, there appear 650-700 in New York state.

In metropolitan Milwaukee, where ELCA considered locating their home offices, a local newspaper feature in the fall of 1986 showed the following numbers in the area where approximately 7% of our synod lives:

66 WELS, 63 LC-MS, 54 LCA, 32 ALC, 4 AELC
 for a total of 219. Only 11 have been organized since 1970! 80 during the 30 years before!

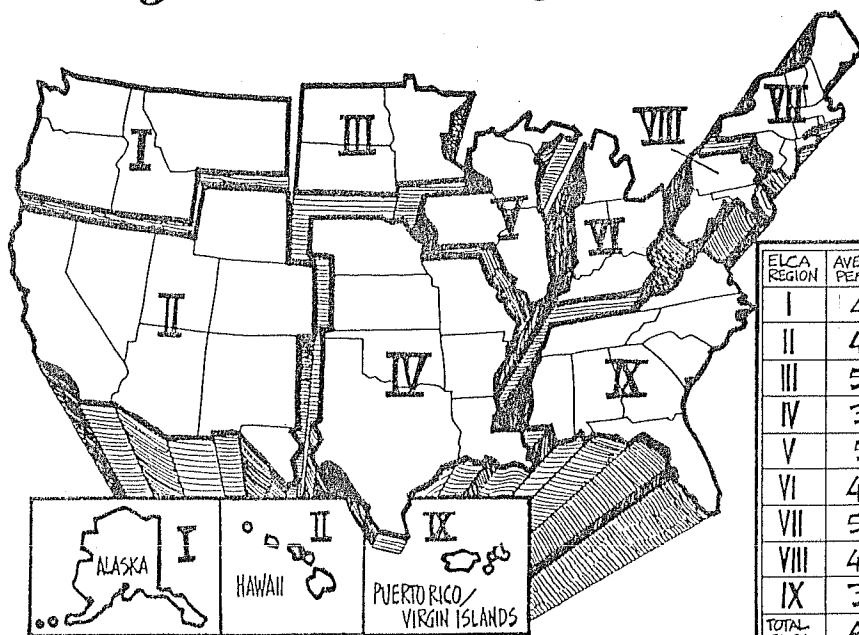
Obviously, LC-MS does well upstate and ALC in the western half of Wisconsin to both surpass WELS in total numbers in their own home state. This might be still another cause to raise the question whether we should be referred to as the "Wisconsin" Synod. A number of our North Atlantic District pastors and laymen have expressed agreement with the recent writer to the editor of the Northwestern Lutheran that a change is in order. However, whether "World" Ev. Lutheran Synod fits our goal of indigenous churches where we do world mission work is doubtful. Any other suggestions?!

SYNODS & REGIONS

The new body will be composed of 65 Synods, paralleling 53 now in place among the three bodies. On top of this will be an overlay of 9 Regions, which will coordinate and assist in such things as seminary training, family services, college monitoring, home missions, "mobility of ordained ministers," and campus ministries.

Below are the Regions and Notes of Special Interest on certain of them:

Signs of vitality among ELCA members



Compiled by Dr. Carl F. Reuss, assistant for research coordination in the office of the presiding bishop of the American Lutheran Church, based on 1984 congregational statistics of the three church bodies uniting to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): the ALC, Lutheran Church in America, and Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches.

ELCA REGION	AVERAGE NO. PER CONG.	% ATTENDING WORSHIP	% COMMUNING DURING YEAR	AVERAGE ANNUAL GIFT TO CONG.
I	427	33.5%	59.5%	\$185
II	444	38.5%	62.7%	\$252
III	542	32.6%	60.3%	\$147
IV	384	36.7%	64.2%	\$203
V	562	32.2%	61.8%	\$159
VI	466	33.0%	59.1%	\$183
VII	508	25.2%	56.0%	\$149
VIII	459	27.8%	54.8%	\$157
IX	352	39.9%	62.7%	\$235
TOTAL ELCA	480	32.3%	59.9%	\$173

- III. - 9 Synods: North Dakota divided into two parts, South Dakota synod unto itself, and Minnesota 6 Synods - Metro Minneapolis East and West, and the four corners of the state.
- V. - 13 Synods: This region, comprised of only three states and the U.P. of Michigan represents a whopping 20% of the church's synods. Along with Iowa and Illinois, Wisconsin has 5 synods of its own and a sixth is made up of 6 northern counties and the U. P. Wisconsin Synods are:
- West Central
 - East Central (Fox Cities)
 - Southeast (Milwaukee, Racine, & Kenosha Co. mostly)
 - South Central (Madison)
 - Southwest
- VI. 6 Synods: 2 of which in Michigan - Detroit area & outstate.
(upper peninsula with 6 Wisconsin counties)
- VII. 7 Synods: New England makes up one Synod(193 congregations)
New York is composed of 2 Synods - metro NY & upstate.
*Slovak, non-geographic synod made part of this region, is unique entity in all of the denomination!

So much for those regions lining up with areas "most dear" to our own denomination.

The nine synods will be assigned to the various 8 seminaries for their support. Whether there would be any kind of restriction on students wishing to matriculate at a seminary outside of their home region, I don't know. The eight seminaries and their regions are: (students/faculty)

- II. Berkeley, CA (182/17) - Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
- III. St. Paul, MN (841/57) - Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary
- V. Chicago, IL (308/28) - Luth. School of Theology at Chicago
- Dubuque, IA (270/20) - Wartburg Theological Seminary
- VI. Columbus, OH (300/23) - Trinity Lutheran Seminary
- VII. PhiladelphiaPA(285/33)- The Lutheran Theological Seminary
- VIII. Gettysburg, PA(275/21)- Lutheran Theological Seminary
- IX. Columbia, SC (161/15) - Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

*These above stats are from Lutheran Higher Education Directory, 1983, compiled by Lutheran Brotherhood.

The eight seminaries are 8 of the 18 listed in that directory, and enroll 59% of seminary students nationally. 1,282 of the remaining 1,813 from the 4,435 sem students nationally were at either of the LC-MS schools. Almost half the remaining 531 seminarians(228)were at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, meaning the smallest seven seminaries educate a total of 7% of America's seminarians. Such is the 93% monopoly of seminary instruction among the three largest bodies to be - ELCA, LC-MS, & WELS.

Among CNLC hopes are that....

- 1) Columbia, SC, relatively small seminary might relocate to Atlanta, GA, where empty facilities of other denominations are being offered.
- 2) Talks resume on possible merger of Philadelphia & Gettysburg Sems
- 3) The large geographical Region IV have their own seminary, preferably in Texas, with Spanish emphasis.

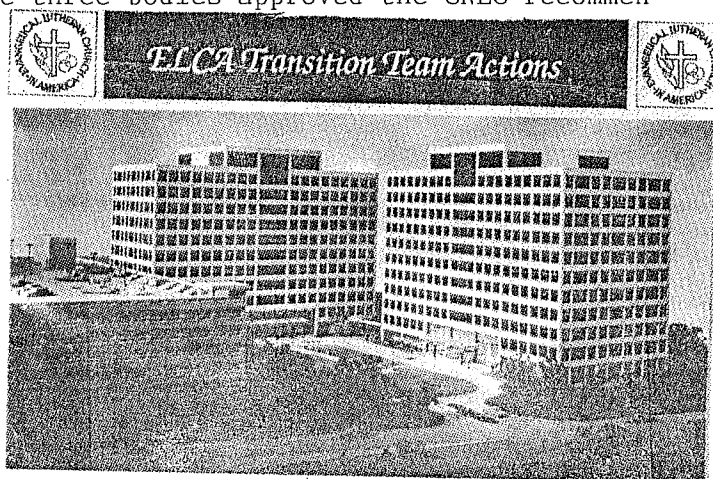
Several pages of the Report and Recommendations of the CNLC are given to proposed governance of the various colleges which will come under the jurisdictions of the regions and synods, but nothing nearly as distinct in direction given as with the seminaries - and understandably so.

MAIN OFFICES OF ELCA -

The 1986 Convention of the three bodies approved the CNLC recommendation that...

- A) Chicago be designated as the main offices for the new church.

In March, 1987, the CNLC approved purchase of an 11-story building in Chicago's O'Hare Plaza complex for \$27.8 million. Occupancy costs are set at \$5 million. 400 employees will occupy the first 7 floors and the remaining 4 rented out until needed. Annual occupancy costs are estimated at \$2.5-3.



ELCA HEADQUARTERS BUILDING SELECTED: Members of the national Transition Team approved the purchase of an 11-story building on the far northwest side of Chicago (structure on right) as the headquarters for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE, March 23, 1987.

- B) Government Affairs and Service to Military Personnel be located in Washington, D.C.
- C) Board of Pensions be located in Minneapolis.
- D) ELCA publishing house be located in Minneapolis and Philadelphia. Early plans called for a publishing house, with regional distribution centers throughout the church.

CHURCH OFFICERS - ("Church" referring to body at large)

Bishop, ordained minister(male or female), chairs assembly(church convention) elected by assembly(church convention), full-time, salaried

VP LAYPERSON, chairs CHURCH COUNCIL, no salary

SEC Corporate responsibilities,(ordained or lay?), elected, full-time salaried

TREAS Corporate responsibilities, (ordained or lay?), elected 4yr, full-time, salaried.

Executive Assistant for Administration(Bishop aide), nominated by Bishop to Church Council, elected coterminous with bishop.

REGIONAL CENTERS FOR MISSION

Guidelines for the structuring, staffing, responsibilities, office locations, and other decisions related to them shall not be made until the synods have been organized.

A council of Bishops from each Synod in the Region will be the governing board. Provision at this time calls for only one full-time salaried coordinator.

This could be a "when funding becomes available" situation as the church feels its way into operation.

SYNODS -

Synod "Assemblies" at least on biennium basis.

OFFICERS - Same as above, except no executive assistant for the Bishop, who is also responsible for ordinations and full-time church workers' management. Secretary & Treasurer unsalaried.

SYNOD ASSEMBLIES - (minimum 60% to be lay people)

10% of full-time workers are to be sanctioned for voting. "Full-time workers" includes lay professionals, consecrated deacons and deaconesses, and "commissioned teachers." Whether Christian day school/high school teachers should be recognized as "ministers of the Gospel" was a bone of contention early, affecting AELC congregations in particular which would have had some carryover in maintaining schools from their LC-MS days.

Because, all ordained ministers under call on the roster of the synod would be voting members!

Also voting delegates: two lay members from each congregation, one male and the other female.

The 90% full-time workers not delegates have voice, though not vote rights, encouraging their attendance anyway.

SYNOD COUNCIL -

This board governs the Synod between its assemblies, carrying out its resolutions and seeing that the functions are in order.

Among the 15 to 29 members of this board are the four officers of the Synod and one youth!

Each Synod fiscal year is February 1 to January 31; and the Church, which receives its funds from the Synods(hoping for 55 to 65%), will have a fiscal year, March 1 to February 28.

Did You Catch That, Mayfair Road Folks!?!?

CHURCH DIVISIONS -

These are quite self-explanatory:

Congregational life
Education
Global Mission
Ministry
Outreach
Social Ministry Organization

Here we would like to draw special attention to the Outreach goals in particular. The ELCA is targeting a commitment to open 1,200 new congregations in the first seven years of existence. This will be at an acknowledged cost of \$500,000 to \$750,000 each. Collectively, this would imply a layout of \$600 million to \$900 million.

Can it be done?

*ALC began 50 congregations in 1984 under a "Fifty More in '84" campaign. They have added about 400 congregations in their 25 year history.

*LCA added 25 congregations to their roster in 1985.

Interesting facts regarding startup of new churches in the LCA of late include:

- 1) requirement of 70-100 nucleus for denominational funds to be invested in the group.
- 2) regarding those 25 churches in 1985: 11% of the new church members came by letter of transfer; 17% were transfers from other denominations; and 72% had no church affiliation at all!

*We ought to find out how they do it!

THIS & THAT (From Constituting Rules)

Besides the six church divisions, there are to be Five Commissions. Most noteworthy among them is the "Commission for Women to enable this church to realize the full participation of women." A separate women's organization is also called for. The 60% lay people who are to be in all organizational units are supposed to match up 50/50 male/female as close as possible. The one exception is that there are no quotas at this time in regard to male/female ordained reps in organizations, because of still being far short women to make it work...but when!?

A second commission for multi-cultural ministries will seek to serve and involve Asians, Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans. 10% minorities serving on all organizational units along with the 50/50 ratio above has a ten year targetted goal.

Voting Membership is defined as "such confirmed members who have communed and made a contribution of record during the current or preceding year."

Associate Member is a new church relationship to me. These are people "holding membership in other Lutheran(Christian)congregations who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation." They have all the privileges(in particular, communion) except the right to vote and hold office.

Another eye opener is the 2/3 congregational vote for excommunication instead of assumed unanimous decision in our circle.

An ironic twist running counter to lay involvement are the two of three alternate congregational arrangements calling for the pastor to be ex-officio president of both the congregation and its council.

Commissioned teachers, deacons, deaconesses, lay professional leaders(such youth ministers), and commissioned church staff are rostered on call lists under the umbrella "associates in ministry."

A solid constitutional requirement calls for ordained clergy to serve a minimum 3 year parish ministry before taking a call to another kind of office, "because the responsibilities of the office of the ordained ministry are most clearly focused in the congregational pastorate."

Perhaps, the regularity with which seminary graduates are assigned to world mission fields, new mode missions, synod school tutor positions could receive further evaluation among us.

III. THE SHAPE OF THEOLOGY TO BE EXPECTED FROM THE ELCA.

Below is the confession of faith upon which the new church will be founded:

Chapter 2.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

- 2.01. This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 2.02. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
 - a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
 - b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.
- 2.03. This church accepts the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life.
- 2.04. This church accepts the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as true declarations of the faith of this church.
- 2.05. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a true witness to the Gospel, acknowledging as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.
- 2.06. This church accepts the other confessional writings in the Book of Concord, namely, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise, the Small Catechism, the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, as further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church.
- 2.07. This church confesses the Gospel, recorded in the Holy Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and Lutheran confessional writings, as the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

For the most part, the above sounds pretty good. We would here draw your attention to just two points above(as noted). Perhaps, you might note other "holes" in this statement of faith:

Regarding the Word of God, WELS seminary Professor Leroy Dobberstein put it this way in the Winter, 1987, WLQ:

Any voice which questioned the wording or suggested a change in the articles of faith, such as adding the word "sole" to the declaration that the Bible is the "authoritative source and norm of (the church's)proclamation, faith and life," or the request to retain the words "inerrant," and infallible," was easily outvoted.

The new church's Task Force on Theology defended the exclusion of such words stating, "These terms can be used in a way that implies a precision alien to the minds of the authors of the Scriptures and their own use of the Scriptures. These terms can be used to divert attention from the message of salvation and the instruction of righteousness which are key themes of the Scriptures. They may encourage artificial harmonizations rather than serious wrestling with the implication of scriptural statements which may seem to disagree."

Such flowery smokescreening only thinly veils the higher-critic's aim not to be tied down to Scripture at face value. Conversely, the word "proclamation" calls for the preacher/teacher to be an "inspired" mouth-piece of God - not that dissimilar from continuing revelation theology.

Of course, lack of faithfulness to the Scriptures is far from harmless. Stapled at the end of this paper is a survey(perhaps by a Lutheran insurance company)of religious thought among Lutherans in the Detroit Metropolitan area. This poll was taken in the early to mid- 1970s. Statistics from that particular part of the country, more than decade ago, I feel are today quite representative of where Lutherans fall theologically today. On occasion, I have shared this survey with prospects to our congregation to display the spectrum of thought among Lutherans today. You can check it out on your own later, or time permitting and interest warranting, we can discuss it together at the end of this presentation.

Here let us note on the issue of inerrancy, the survey found 74% LC-MS, 19% ALC, and 10% LCA in agreement. Most interestingly, the laity ran 76% WELS, 62% LC-MS, 35% ALC, 29% LCA.

When we examine the results of loosening from the moors of God's Word as reflected in the new Lutheran church, let us not dwell upon the bizarre- the Christian News type sensationalism of gays, condoms, abortion, pornography, and the like - though these are manifestations of people who have lost the handle on God's will ..and more. Lutheran Alert would draw our attention to deviations from scriptural truth, historic Christianity, and the Lutheran Confessions(no matter what they say)such as even denial of the Trinity, Virgin Birth, and the physical Resurrection of Christ. The survey mentioned above shows degrees of adherence to other basic points of theology such as original sin, creation, universalism, and morality.

A recent study by LCA of their members showed that baby-boomers "are more interested in a local church's friendliness than in its particular doctrine or practices of piety. Denominational pedigree, rightness of doctrine and constancy in the practice of piety have lost drawing power." The liberal clergy have instructed their constituency well! Note on the survey from Detroit that in themore liberal Lutheran denominations, the clergy "believe" less than their laypeople.

A Scriptural, Doctrinal, and Spiritual vacuum has a way of filling itself with something. Feeling that the new church is concentrating on the social instead of spiritual, Lowell Almen in the November 1, 1985, Lutheran Standard editorial opinion, writes:

But what is emerging is staffing that inevitably will shift central attention from global mission and new congregations

in the U. S. - as well as education, social services, and congregational life - to issues of society. Rather than calling the new church either the ELC in the U.S.A. or Lutheran Church in the U.S.A., perhaps we should name it what it might become:
Lutheran Church of the Latest Social Issue or Lutheran Church of the Present Movement.

In a later writing Almen voiced the opinion that the ALC and its partners were "moving down the road to becoming little more than the ecclesiastical wing of the Democratic party." Besides noting the activities of the three churches in recent years, Almen makes his point by drawing attention to plans for the new church which propose a staff of 42 for world missions outreach, 39 for home missions outreach, but a total of 85 for the commissions for the church in society, women and multi-cultural ministries.

Yet the theological vacuum demonstrates itself most of all in the ongoing ecumenical spirit shown. Independently and collectively, the new church participants appear to be on a euphorical merger high which sees no limit short of the sky.

Forget the peripheral joint activities in organizations such as the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches! We're talking about altar and pulpit fellowship leading to more mergers - soon? Not hurting them any, but the LC-MS, are the five cooperative agencies which are to continue between the ELCA and the LC-MS. These are:

- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services
- Lutheran Education Conference of North America
- Lutheran Film Association
- Lutheran Resources Commission-Washington
- Lutheran World Relief

But beyond this, four foreign Lutheran congregations are also currently served jointly by the two bodies in Frankfurt, Germany; Guam; Okinawa; and Seoul, Korea. The new church body is calling for this relationship to continue. Not mentioned in the book of Reprots and Recommendations are the two U. S. joint ventures between the two bodies. One dual congregation is in Manteca, California; the other in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The New England Trinity/St. Matthew congregation is a real embarassment to the 64 congregation NE District head Rev. David Mulder. Pastor at Bristol, CT in the Hartford area, conservative Mulder has opened talks to break up the 13 year relationship. Good for Missouri! Bad for ELCA! They could use all the positive influence they can get, though we seriously need to acknowledge what the ELCA will need to learn is not to jump in bed with any warm body. LC-MS showing some fellowship principles is good for ELCA.

Already approaching the point of no return are dialogues and fellowshiping with Episcopalians, Presbyterian Reformed, and Roman Catholics. Back in 1982 already, ALC convention voted "limited sharing of communion with the Episcopal Church." Representatives of the new church have now completed Dialogues I & II with the Episcopalians, and on June 7-11 will reach Session VII of Dialogue III. What meaningful concessions the ELCA reps expect to get from the Episcopalians are unclear, but from the Lutheran side one dialoguer is ready to sell down the river regarding apostolic succession:

We Lutherans should welcome the successive laying-on of

hands by bishops all through church history as a sign of apostolicity, and if it is absent, it is right for us to work for its introduction. The question we face is whether the kairos has arrived for the introduction of the historic episcopacy in American Lutheranism. We may seize the opportunity as a result of this six year study or let it slip through our fingers.

If the ELCA reps are willing to uncle under the apostolic succession issue, the way could be paved for full altar and pulpit fellowship in the near future, leading ultimately toa merger!

Playing their middle against both ends, the ELCA members, led by the ALC are making overtures to the Reformed faiths as well. In the winter issue Dialog, Peter Bastien, who identifies himself as an ardent ecumenist, confronts ALC Bishop David Preus (remember him? we identified early as the "foot-dragger" originally on merger!) concerning the Reformed dialogue:

Up here in New England it is not at all unusual to run into Reformed (mostly UCC) clergy who think of themselves as 'post-Christians' and who openly disdain the entire doctrinal basis of Confessional Christianity. We often kid them that there is only a piece of tissue paper separating them from the Unitarians. But if they are in my pulpit, the time for kidding is over!

If the doctrine of the real presence can mean anything we want it to, does it mean anything at all?

Good question!

Nor has the ELCA body-to-be pulled up short of the Protestant/Catholic line. The Pope and Dr. Crumley have been exchanging love letters. The Pope suggested to the LCA head aiming "at the start of the next century as a special time for seeking full unity in Christ." Crumley responded, "If the convergences that have grown so much in the last 20 years continue at the same pace in the next such period then we will find that unity between us what we are so sure God intended." (merger?!)

If you are wondering about those "convergences," counted among them could be the 1979 New England Lutheran and Roman Catholic leaders issuing of a joint pastoral letter. That first on the ecumenical stage (involving LC-MS too at that time, by the way!) went out to their congregations urging "well planned events which will provide the Lutheran and Catholic people an opportunity to grow in mutual understanding and fellowship." The letter was published October 28 to coincide with the observance of the Reformation in the Lutheran congregations.

However, while early this 1987 the Executive Council of the LCA was outlining guidelines for shared eucharist with the Reformed, the Roman Catholics bishops in the U. S. were spurning their would-be suitors. What they did was simply reiterate the official Roman Catholic view that Christians who are not Roman Catholics are welcome to attend celebrations of the Eucharist under Roman Catholic auspices, but they are not generally (emphasis mine) invited to receive the bread and wine:

Reception of the Eucharist by Christians not fully united with us would imply oneness which does not exist, and yet for

which we must all pray. Those not receiving sacramental communion are encouraged to express in their hearts(?) a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus, and with one another.

It would be nice if the ELCA could learn from the straight-forward confessional position of the bishops. The U. S. bishops might feel the Pope goes too "conservative," or should we say ex cathedra on a number of issues - in particular, sexual ones, but they show themselves capable of some common sense once in a while too. After a little thought regarding the "heat" above, as typed in the March 9, 1987, Lutheran Perspective, I had second thoughts if it really was a misprint. Merger fever these days in Lutheran circles matches up all too closely with the proverbial one-track-minded dog in her season.

Will 5,300,000 Lutherans be flushed away in this merger nonsense? Back in August, 1986, sixteen pastors and ten lay people from seven states met at Calvary Church in St. Paul, MN, to discuss formation of an "Association of American Lutheran Churches," should the merger go through. How big a dent they could make in the 5.3 million is very small at best. Less than two decades ago the number of LC-MS congregations who were willing to bow out when their synod was obviously headed awry amounted to only a handful, something like 7-11 forming the Federation of Authentic Lutherans FAL. Later, this group merged (if we may use that word) with our WELS.

Before and after merger provision has been made for congregations to pull out. To do so, there must be one 2/3 vote to tip off the area bishop of their intent. Then, after a minimum 90 days' "counselling" by him, they may vote again - in his presence - at which another 2/3 vote would allow them to leave and join another Lutheran body. If they are going independent, then, according to present LCA policy, they must also have the blessing of their synod in order to retain their property - which could get real sticky with messy court proceedings and all, as evidenced in recent years with many churches and faiths.

Typical of the 863 ALC congregations voting no to the merger might well be Bethel Lutheran, one of 13 congregations voting no in the 111 congregation Los Angeles area. There about 90% of the 220 family congregation voted against merger. Yet their pastor says they are definitely not one that will drop out. "It doesn't help to take your ball and go home," says Pastor John Steward. "We want to be a part of the answer."

Where does that leave us? We end with the words of Professor Irwin Habeck, since departed to that Church Universal in the sky; in the spring of 1984, when matters were still less defined on the merger. He had this to say in the Winter, 1982, WLQ:

We shall remain interested observers. Whatever the outcome of the merger negotiations may be, we shall no doubt continue to be stigmatized as an insignificant minority of ultraconservative Lutherans. We pray that in the Lord's eyes we may continue to be found faithful to His holy and inerrant Word. Then we may still be a barb in the conscience of those who have veered away from the Word and hopefully be used to stem the tide which threatens to sweep liberal Lutherans completely into a broad ecumenism which renders only lip service to the Bible and the Savior Whom it reveals.

From the 1987 Lutheran Annual — Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod.

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Lutheran Church Bodies in North America

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* denotes member of Lutheran Council in U.S.A.

From a Survey of Lutheranism in Metropolitan Detroit Area

The percentage of pastors accepting the statement "The Bible is God's Word and all it says is true," was WELS 100%, MS 74%, ALC 19%, ICA 10%. Laymens acceptance of this statement was WELS 76%, MS 62%, ALC 35%, ICA 29%.

Clergy and lay disagreement with "The account of Adam and Eve falling into sinfulness is simply a story which did not take place in reality," (percentages in parentheses are for laymen) was: WELS 100% (83%), MS 80% (81%), ALC 28% (59%), ICA 17% (48%).

Agreement with, "Only those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior can go to heaven," was: WELS 100% (84%), MS 84% (75%), ALC 52% (58%), ICA 43% (65%)

Agreement with "A child is already sinful at birth," was: 100% (79%), MS 96% (77%), ALC 74% (58%), ICA 67% (45%).

The age of the respondent did not make a difference with laymen, but did with clergymen. The answers of young clergymen showed a decided tendency toward liberalism. If the trend continues dramatic changes can be expected in Lutheran belief patterns in the future.

Disagreement with "A woman has the right to have an abortion if she wants one," was: WELS 100% (80%), MS 92% (76%), ALC 82% (71%), ICA 57% (67%).

Agreement with "It is right that convicted murderers should be given the death penalty," was: WELS 100%, MS 79%, ALC 43%, ICA 17%. About 50% of the laymen agreed with the statement.

Agreement with "It is all right for a person to engage in sexual relations before marriage with the person he or she intends to marry," was: WELS 6% (8%), MS 17% (13%), ALC 17% (17%), ICA 13% (17%).

Agreement with "It is possible that a particular situation could justify extra-marital relation was: WELS 6% (19%), MS 17% (16%), ALC 30% (22%), ICA 44% (26%).

Clergy agreement with "The unchanging Law of God is an absolute standard by which to measure man's conduct," was: WELS 100%, MS 87%, ALC 69%, ICA 45%.

Agreement with "Do you think women should have as equal a voice in church decisions as men?" was: WELS 0% (49%), MS 47% (71%), ALC 98% (86%), ICA 98% (91%).

Agreement with "Women should be allowed to become ordained ministers," was: WELS 0% (39%), MS 8% (47%), ALC 30% (68%), ICA 62% (73%).

Disagreeing with "The most important thing is the salvation of mankind to eternal life rather than carrying on a social reform program here in this world" was: WELS 6% (8%), MS 15% (10%), ALC 43% (25%), ICA 75% (29%).

Asked whether they approved of civil disobedience clergymen replied affirmatively: WELS 0%, MS 9%, ALC 32%, ICA 56%.

Disagreeing with "A Lutheran can accept a view of the evolution of man from lower forms of animals as quite possible," was: WELS 100% (79%), MS 81% (70%), ALC 22% (55%), ICA 22% (54%)

The number of congregations involved in the study are as follows: WELS 16, MS 121, ALC 47, ICA 59. The Lutherans selected to be interviewed were drawn from membership rolls of each of the four participating Lutheran bodies. Trained interviewers called on every ninth home of a congregations membership roll. In all 213 questions were asked. The above are only a small sampling. Also questionnaires were sent to every Lutheran parish clergyman within the study boundary area. While questions might be raised in regard to the lack of clarity of some of the questions, we still get a good general overview of beliefs and attitudes.

WELS= Wis. EV. Lutheran Synod, MS = Missouri Synod, ALC = American Lutheran Church, ICA = Lutheran Church in America.

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